DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 883 CS 010 412

AUTHOR Bass, Jo Ann F.
TITLE Emergent Literacy: Ensuring that Students "Emerge" with Self-Esteem Intact.
PUB DATE 13 Dec 90
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Reading Forum (11th, Sarasota, FL, December 12-15, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; *Classroom Communication; *Classroom Environment; Cooperative Learning; Oral Reading; Primary Education; Questioning Techniques; *Reading Instruction; Reading Strategies; *Self Esteem; Student Needs; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Emergent Literacy

ABSTRACT

Reading is an area of the curriculum that contains many opportunities for students to develop self-esteem. Three common procedures used in the classroom, however, are likely to threaten students' self-esteem: required oral reading; team selection and the aspect of competing and declaring winners and losers; and question and answer procedures. Alternatives to required oral reading include one-to-one reading; choral reading using big books and language experience charts; reading along with a tape-recording of a predictable book; "partner reading"; "perfection reading"; and "impress reading." Alternatives to competitive teams include random selection of team members and avoidance of team rankings. Alternatives to traditional question and answer techniques are to ask questions a student can answer; rephrasing the question for the student; giving praise for the part of an answer that is correct; and offering clues. Instructional strategies for fostering self-esteem in beginning readers are dependent upon the teacher. Whenever teachers are unsure as to whether a classroom practice will damage a students' self-esteem, the teachers should ask themselves how they would feel in that situation. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED328883

Emergent Literacy: Ensuring that Students "Emerge" with Self-Esteem Intact

Jo Ann F. Bass

Arkansas State University

Paper presented at
American Reading Forum
Longboat Key, Florida
December 13, 1990

CS010413

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jo Ann F. Bass

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Emergent Literacy: Ensuring that Students "Emerge" with Self-Esteem Intact

Jo Ann F. Bass

Arkansas State University

Reading is an area of the curriculum that contains many opportunities for students to develop self-esteem, or a belief in oneself. Gaining command of the written word is a way to open the door to a lifetime of learning and living confidently in the world. Unfortunately, too many youngsters in the classrooms across America are not developing positive views of themselves and the world around them. They learn from their interactions with administrators, teachers, and peers that they are not a vital element in the school. In effect, they learn that they don't count.

Any situation that causes children to lose face before their teachers and especially their peers has the same end result - a blow to the self-esteem. In this paper, I will discuss some common procedures, used with students who are learning to read, that are threatening to self-esteem. Alternative activities will be presented for each procedure that is described.

Self-esteem is threatened when students feel they have not been able to respond adequately in competitive situations. Students in these situations may feel inferior, inadequate, and embarrassed because of their poor performance. Humphrey and Humphrey (1985) call this condition competitive stress and urge teachers to guard against practices that may result in

competition. While competition cannot be eliminated, it can be adjusted so that the classroom is not dominated by competitive activities, but rather by cooperative activities. It is incumbent upon the teacher to create an environment where children can build self-esteem.

One frequently-observed procedure in kindergarten and first grade classrooms that could result in a loss of self-esteem is required oral reading in front of the teacher and other children. Teachers ask students to read aloud from the basal reader, instructional charts, and workbooks and worksheets. Often students are asked to "perform" for others in the class without having been provided the opportunity to read or "rehearse" the material silently. According to Gentile and McMillan (1987), the teacher creates further stress as the students read orally by frequently interrupting them to correct errors, by stopping oral readers who are performing poorly and calling on another student to continue, by enlisting other students to "help" the child experiencing problems, and by mimicking or evaluating the performance of the student reading orally. When the above situations occur, the teacher is creating an environment based on competition, an environment in which the child who is able to read well orally emerges as the winner and the one who cannot read well is viewed as a loser.

To make oral reading a more positive experience for emergent readers, the teacher must first examine the purposes for asking these students to read orally. Many teachers would say that their primary purpose for oral reading is to see if the students "know"

the words. In other words, they use oral reading as a means of testing word recognition. If this is the purpose, then oral reading is best done on a one-to-one basis. After all, the teacher can listen to the reading of only one child at a time and be assured of accuracy in noting errors. Additionally, since assessment leads to instruction, the teacher should record the words a child does not "know" so effective instruction can be planned. Conducting oral reading in this manner eliminates the teacher's frequent correction of errors and calling on other students to "help" the oral reader. Any teacher comments concerning the quality of the child's reading will be made to the individual doing the reading and not to a group of students.

A second, often-cited reason for oral reading in front of other students is to provide practice of the words that have been taught. Oral reading is seen as a way of developing fluent readers; however, students reading alone in front of a group may be less fluent due to the physiological and psychological effects of stress. Changes in blood pressure, heartbeat, muscle tension, and dilation of the pupils of the eyes may cause students to experience difficulty pronouncing words. Likewise, thoughts of inadequacy or embarrassment may make the oral reader unable to concentrate on the pronunciation of the words.

To develop fluency, the teacher of beginning readers could provide practice through whole-class or small-group choral reading. Big Books and language experience charts can be read repeatedly. Then if the teacher feels a child can read the material successfully and if the child expresses a desire to read

in front of a group, he/she should be permitted to do so. The child who does not want to participate in reading alone in front of a group should not be required to do it. Provided successful experiences with choral reading and an accepting, supportive environment, the child should eventually want to read in front of a group.

Another small-group activity for developing fluency is reading along with a tape-recorded version of a predictable book, Big Book, or language experience chart. The teacher can record the material following the suggestions of Marie Carbo in the Carbo Recorded Book Method. Since the gap between the students' reading level and the readability level of the material will be small, the teacher could prepare a tape about four to five minutes in length. The teacher would want to read at a pace that is almost normal. Words would be chunked into phrases with about five to eight words per phrase. Expression normally used by the teacher would be appropriate. After two or three read-along sessions, students in the small group should be able to read the material fluently with no more than two or three errors (Carbo, Dunn, & Dunn, 1986).

Partner reading as described by Harmin (1990) is an effective way to provide practice when students show a preference for working with one other student. Students take turns reading to each other and proceed in any way they choose. In addition to the directions given by Harmin, it is important that the two students be able to get along with each other. The teacher could assign

pairs after observing and determining students who work well together.

Perfection reading is described by Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham, and Moore (1989). To prepare for the technique, select a short passage at the student's instructional level. For beginning readers, the passage would probably be taken from the basal reader, language experience stories, Big Books, or predictable books. Although the authors suggest giving the student the passage and telling him/her to read it silently and get ready to read it orally with few errors, for beginning readers it would be better to modify the technique. Conduct several whole-class or small-group choral readings of the passage before asking the student to read it orally with few errors. If the student makes more than five errors per 100 words when reading the passage orally, the passage should be replaced with an easier one. If the student makes no more than five errors per 100 words, ask the student to practice the material again. The student may practice with a partner who assists in counting errors, or the student may read silently and record his/her errors. This procedure continues for three or four rereadings with the student trying to make fewer errors each time.

The final oral reading technique is called impress reading (Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham, & Moore, 1989). The student is given a passage at or below his/her instructional level and asked to practice it before reading orally with the teacher. As with the previous technique, the student may read with a partner or silently for practice. After practicing, the student and teacher

reread the material orally at the same time. The teacher adjusts the rate to accommodate the student, and if the student experiences difficulty, the teacher slows down and takes a lead of a fraction of a word.

The second practice that is often seen in kindergarten and first grade classrooms and has the potential to threaten self-esteem is competitive teams. Team selection as well as the aspect of competing and declaring winners and losers can make children feel they are not worthy.

Youngs (1985) charted the major stressors for children from kindergarten through sixth grade. In grades three through six, being chosen last on any team was the number one stressor. Various kinds of teams are quite common in kindergarten and first grade even though being chosen last for a team does not appear as a stressor on Youngs' list until third grade. Perhaps if teachers discontinued the practice of letting team captains choose their teams in the lower grades, this stressor would not have such a high rating in the upper grades. The teacher could use different methods of selecting team members. Team members could be randomly selected by drawing names or numbering off. Sometimes it may be desirable to have an even distribution of high achievers and low achievers on the teams. Then the teacher would need to select the teams in advance. When announcing the teams to the class, care should be taken to mix up the order in which the names are called out so that the names of low achievers are not called out last each time.

Another problem arises in the classroom when cooperative teams or groups become competitive. Slavin, Madden, and Stevens (1989/1990) described teams composed of students from different reading groups. Students' scores on graded work such as quizzes, compositions, and book reports contribute to a team score. Teams obtaining a 90 percent on the week's activities are declared superteams and are given attractive certificates while teams obtaining 80-89 percent are named greatteams and are given less attractive certificates.

Because team rankings are announced in front of the class, situations such as the one described above present another opportunity for students to feel intellectually inadequate. Perhaps focusing on the process instead of the product would be a better approach to team efforts. Johnson and Johnson (1989-1990) recommended identifying a social skill that is desirable in cooperative work, giving group points and group rewards to increase the use of the skill, summarizing points daily, and giving social and tangible rewards for reading a predetermined number of points. Points are awarded only for using the identified social skill and are never taken away. The tangible reward usually consists of giving students extra time in activities that they value.

The final classroom practice to be discussed is question and answer procedures. Students are put into a competitive situation when the teacher asks a question and calls on one student to attempt to answer the question. If the student fails to answer the question correctly, the teacher usually continues to call on

other students until the correct answer is given. Sometimes students are asked to write an answer on the board or on a chart in front of other students as well as give an oral answer. When the student answers the question incorrectly, he/she is asked to go back to his/her seat and another student is called on to answer. Both of these question/answer arrangements can be embarrassing for the student and cause the self-esteem to be damaged.

One thing a teacher can do to avoid putting young learners in situations such as these is to ask questions that students can answer. The low achievers can often answer critical-level questions more easily than literal-level questions because the answers to critical-level questions have no definite right or wrong answer that comes from the reading material. Questions that begin with "How would you feel if. . ." and "What would you. . ." are answered from the student's prior knowledge. Most of the time a student is able to produce a reasonable response.

When the teacher does ask a question and the child answers incorrectly, several options are available for turning a negative experience into a positive one. The teacher might ask the child to think about the question again and give him/her a second chance. If part of an answer is correct, the teacher can give praise for the correct part before focusing on the incorrect part. Rephrasing the question, telling what the answer is not, and supplying information that acts as a clue are also helpful. The teacher could phrase the question in a multiple-choice format,

giving the student two or three answers from which to choose. Sometimes giving a student the opportunity to explain an answer may reveal that the answer was correct based on his/her interpretation of the question (Collins, 1987).

Cooperative teams can be utilized in answering questions. In a technique called Numbered Heads Together, students in groups of four number off within the group. Then when the teacher asks a question, students in the group discuss the answer, making sure everyone knows the answer. The teacher then calls a number and someone with that number is called on to answer (Kagan, 1989/1990).

Instructional strategies for fostering self-esteem in beginning readers are dependent upon the teacher. Whenever the teacher is unsure about whether a classroom practice will damage students' self-esteem, let this question be a gauge: If I were in this situation, how would I feel? When the question is answered with terms such as humiliated, embarrassed, or dumb, then the teacher should think of an alternative. By putting oneself in the student's place and by using the suggestions in this paper, beginning readers will be able to emerge from their first encounters with reading with their self-esteem intact.

References

Carbo, M., Dunn, R., & Dunn K. (1986). Teaching students to read through their individual learning styles. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Cunningham, P. M., Moore, S. A., Cunningham, J. W., & Moore, D. W. (1989). Reading in elementary classrooms: Strategies and observations (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Collins, C. (1987). Content mastery strategies aid class discussion. The Reading Teacher, 40, 816-818.

Gentile, L. M., & McMillan, M. M. (1987). Stress and difficulties. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Harmin, M. (1990). The Workshop Way to student success. Educational Leadership, 48 (1), 43-47.

Humphrey, J. H., & Humphrey, J. N. (1985). Controlling stress in children. Springfield, IL: Merrill.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1989/1990). Social skills for successful group work. Educational Leadership, 47 (4), 29-33.

Kagan, S. (1989/1990). The structural approach to cooperative learning. Educational Leadership, 47 (4), 12-15.

Slavin, R. E., Madden, N. A., & Stevens, R. J. (1989/1990). Cooperative learning models for the 3 R's. Educational Leadership, 47 (4), 22-28.

Youngs, B. B. (1985). Stress in children. New York: Arbor House.